

WHO THRIVES, WHO STRUGGLES? SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITION AMONG VOCATIONAL TRAINING STUDENTS BEFORE AND DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT. The COVID-19 pandemic may have increased the challenges faced by vocational training (VT) students. Thus, we examined the moderating effect of support-seeking tendencies on the association between context (pre-pandemic or pandemic) and VT students' adjustment in the school-to-work transition. Participants ($n = 109$, M age = 21.59 years) completed a survey during their training (T1, pre-pandemic) and after ending their training (T2). For some, T2 occurred pre-pandemic ($n = 77$), while others completed T2 during the pandemic ($n = 32$). Among participants who were reluctant to seek support at T1, those who experienced a school-to-work transition before the pandemic encountered more difficulties in adjusting to the transition, while those who experienced this transition during the pandemic were better adjusted.

QUI RÉUSSIT, QUI ÉPROUVE DES DIFFICULTÉS? LA TRANSITION VERS LE MARCHÉ DU TRAVAIL DES ÉLÈVES DE LA FORMATION PROFESSIONNELLE AVANT ET PENDANT LA PANDÉMIE DE COVID-19

RÉSUMÉ. Cette étude explore l'effet modérateur de la tendance à rechercher du soutien sur l'association entre le contexte de la transition école-travail (pré-pandémie ou pandémie) et l'ajustement des élèves en formation professionnelle durant cette transition. Les participant·e·s ($n = 109$, âge moyen = 21,59 ans) ont répondu à une enquête pendant leur formation (T1, pré-pandémie) et après l'avoir terminée (T2). Certain·es ont complété le T2 avant la pandémie ($n = 77$), alors que d'autres l'ont complété pendant

celle-ci ($n = 32$). Parmi les individus qui étaient réticents à chercher du soutien au T1, ceux qui ont vécu leur transition avant la pandémie présentaient davantage de difficultés d'adaptation, alors que les personnes ayant vécu cette transition pendant la pandémie étaient mieux adaptées.

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced a global pandemic due to the spread of a novel coronavirus and its associated disease COVID-19 (Xiong et al., 2020). An increase in psychological distress was recorded among the general population, and an urgent call was made for more attention to public mental health (Xiong et al., 2020). The situation evolved rapidly and while it negatively impacted all sectors of life (e.g., tourism, the economy, and health; Goghari et al., 2020), education and training were among those areas most affected. Total closure of universities and training centers, in both public and private sectors, was imposed. There was an urgent need to replace traditional classroom teaching with distance training to ensure pedagogical continuity (Rachid, 2020). These drastic measures influenced how teachers and students interacted and socialized with each other (Elmer et al., 2020). Teachers and education officials had to adapt to the rapid changes associated with COVID-19 and find the most appropriate responses, operating without pre-established guidelines (Reimers et al., 2020).

Although the disruptions caused by COVID-19 affected students of all ages, a Statistics Canada survey at the onset of the pandemic revealed that youth aged 15 to 24 had among the highest levels of mental health difficulties when compared to both their older and younger counterparts (Findlay et al., 2020) (see Figure 1). Prevented from accessing their usual social environment and forced to find ways to cope with isolation and social distancing, young adults' well-being seemed to be particularly affected (Singh et al., 2020). Emerging adults who were pursuing their education were forced to leave their structured educational settings for long periods, lost their daily routines, and had to adapt to remote interactions with teachers, classmates, and friends (Lee, 2020). Similar findings regarding psychological distress in this age group have also been reported in Spain (Odrizola-González et al., 2020) and the United States (Czeisler et al., 2020).

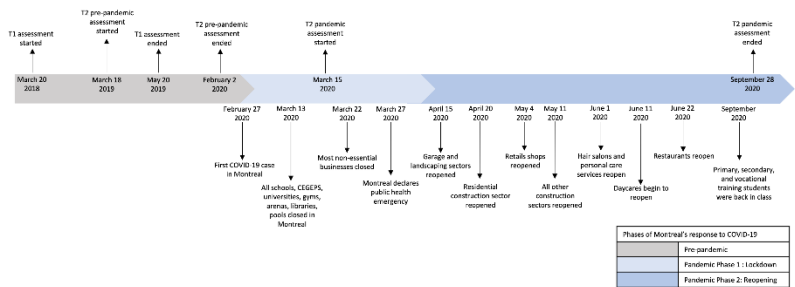


FIGURE 1. Timeline of the pandemic milestones in the province of Quebec

Most individuals in this age range (15 to 24 years) are looking for work, are employed, or are attending post-secondary or vocational training programs. A large number of emerging adults are enrolled in training programs. According to the Ministry of Education, every year in the province of Quebec (Canada), approximately 70,000 adults aged 18 to 29 are enrolled in vocational training (MEES, 2020), which consists of short programs (6 to 18 months). Vocational training students generally represent a vulnerable clientele, often experiencing academic difficulties that tend to persist over time (Mazalon et al., 2016). Moreover, many students experience anxiety and depressive symptoms as well as financial stress (Beaucher et al., 2021; Villemagne & Myre-Bisaillon, 2015). Considering that many vocational training students were already in a vulnerable situation at the onset of the pandemic, it was anticipated that they would experience more pandemic-related difficulties than the rest of the population.

According to resilience theory, an individual's ability to adapt to new circumstances not only depends on their own competence and strengths but also on their ability to obtain support from their social environment (Masten & Motti-Stefanidi, 2020). Resilience is thus a dynamic process that can be indirectly observed through individuals' successful adjustment to a new situation. Personal characteristics and social resources that help individuals achieve positive outcomes while going through a challenging situation are known as "protective factors" (Masten & Motti-Stefanidi, 2020). In the case of vocational training students, seeking social support may be a critical strategy for achieving success, especially given the challenging situation of transitioning from school to work (Demaray et al., 2005). Support-seeking is an individual behavior that can help locate resources from one's surrounding environment (Feeney & Collins, 2015).

This concept thus captures the intersection between individual competence and external resources which is central to resilience theory (Masten & Motti-Stefanidi, 2020).

During the pandemic, seeking social support was a particularly important protective factor for vocational training students. Specifically, their ability to cope and display resilience through this international crisis required special efforts because of the disruption in their usual social contacts. The current study examined the moderating (i.e., protective) effect of the support-seeking tendencies of vocational training students, as measured during their pre-pandemic studies, looking at the association between the context in which their school-to-work transition was assessed (before or during the pandemic; independent variable) and their adjustment to this transition (dependent variable; see Figure 2).

This study aimed to address the following questions: Do students who have a strong tendency to seek social support achieve a more successful transition from school to work than those who do not display this tendency? Is the tendency to seek social support especially important when students experience the school-to-work transition during a major crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic? We hypothesized that having a strong tendency to seek support when facing difficulties while enrolled in a vocational training program would act as a protective factor. As such, support-seeking should promote students' resiliency when transitioning to work, especially in the pandemic context.

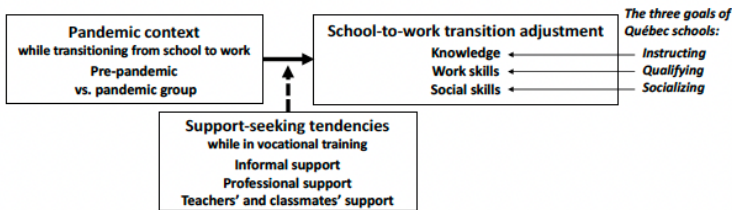


FIGURE 2. Interaction between pandemic context and support-seeking tendencies at T1 predicting dimensions of school-to-work adjustment at T2

METHOD

Participants and procedure

Between March 2018 and May 2019, we recruited a cohort of vocational training students in the province of Quebec (Time 1; T1). We followed up with participants (Time 2; T2) to assess their school-to-work adjustment

about six months after the end of their studies. This follow-up phase began in March 2019. Because the pandemic hit the province during our T2 assessment period, we were able to assess whether the school-to-work transition was more challenging for participants who completed T2 during the pandemic, as compared to those who completed T2 before the pandemic.

The sample consisted of 109 adults aged 18–29 ($M = 21.59$ years, $SD = 2.71$; 78 women and 31 men) from 13 vocational training centers. The targeted sample size at the study onset ($n = 200$) was determined using a power analysis with an anticipated 25% attrition rate from T1 to T2. Because this study focused on the school-to-work transition of emerging adults specifically, only participants in the 18–29 age range were retained. In addition, we restricted our analyses to participants who had completed their schooling within six months of the pandemic onset. Students were enrolled in a variety of programs (e.g., secretarial studies, hairdressing, welding and fitting, professional cooking). At T1, questionnaires were administered in classes within the first half of their program. T2 data were collected after exiting their program (86% after graduating, and 14% after dropping out), either online via the LimeSurvey platform (90%) or via a phone interview (10%). We used March 11, 2020, as marking the beginning of the pandemic in Quebec (see Figure 1). Seventy-one percent of our participants were part of the pre-pandemic group (T2 completed between March 18, 2019 and February 2, 2020), and 29% were in the pandemic group (T2 completed between March 15, 2020 and September 28, 2020).

Measures

Main variables

Support-Seeking Tendencies (T1; moderator). We translated the General Help-Seeking Questionnaire (GHSQ; Rickwood et al., 2005) into French and adapted it to the vocational training setting. The questionnaire was used to assess participants' intentions to seek support from various sources within the next four weeks if they encountered personal or school issues. Sources of support specific to the vocational school context were added (i.e., teachers, other professionals from the vocational training center, classmates). Participants responded on a Likert scale from 1 (extremely unlikely) to 7 (extremely likely). To determine whether sources of support could be grouped into meaningful categories, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis using the IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, version 27). Principal axis factoring with Varimax rotation was used

to identify underlying factors that accounted for the shared variance among the items. Three factors emerged from this analysis. Each factor was interpreted and named based on the content of the items that showed the strongest associations with that factor, as indicated by their factor loadings. The first factor was called *informal support* (partner, friends, parents, other family members), the second factor was called *professional support* (mental health professional, physician/general practitioner, other professionals at vocational training center, phone helpline), and the last one was called *teachers' and classmates' support*. Factor loadings for each item are provided in Table 1. Scores on items within each category of support were averaged.

TABLE 1. *Factor loadings of the adapted general help-seeking questionnaire items*

	Professional support	Informal support	Teachers' & classmates' support
	Factor loadings	Factor loadings	Factor loadings
Mental health professional (e.g., psychologist, psychiatrist, career counsellor)	.766	.077	-.051
Physician/General Practitioner	.652	.104	.126
Professionals at vocational training center (e.g., social worker, resource teacher, principal)	.554	.041	.276
Phone helpline	.545	.060	.006
Parents	.101	.698	.065
Other family members	.164	.524	.107
Friends (excluding family)	.099	.459	.325
Partner	.020	.312	.053
Other vocational training students	.058	.258	.597
Teacher	.520	.112	.572

Pandemic Context (T2; independent variable). This variable reflects whether participants completed the T2 assessment before or during the COVID-19 pandemic (0 = pre-pandemic; 1 = during the pandemic).

School-to-work Transition Adjustment (T2; dependent variable). Defining adjustment in the school-to-work transition is complex because it is a multifaceted construct. Thus, we anchored our conceptualization in the Policy on Educational Success, published by the Government of Quebec (2017). According to this policy, Quebec schools must play three complementary roles: (a) provide instruction that fosters students' learning and intellectual development, (b) provide qualifications that will enable students to play a useful role in the workplace, and (c) socialize youth and

prepare them to live and work harmoniously with others (see Figure 2). To measure these three complementary roles in vocational training populations, we used a validated questionnaire developed by our team (Author). This questionnaire had three dimensions that represent the three complementary roles of Quebec schools, that is, promoting students' *knowledge* (4 items; $\omega = .65$; e.g., "I understand the concepts taught during my vocational training program," "I can explain concepts related to my career"), *work skills* (10 items; $\omega = .87$; e.g., "My training helps me do tasks at work," "With my training, I can easily face new challenges at work"), and *social skills* (10 items; $\omega = .85$; e.g., "I am good at conflict resolution," "I can work as a team"). Only participants who were employed at T2 completed the work skills dimension (84%, $n = 91$). Responses were given on a Likert scale, from 1 (hardly ever) to 6 (nearly always). Scores of items within each dimension were averaged.

Control variables

Demographics (T1). Participants reported on their gender (0 = Men; 1 = Women) and age was computed using their birth date.

School performance (T1). Participants were asked to compare their school performance with their classmates, from 1 (I am among the worst) to 5 (I am among the best). Due to some low cell sizes, a dichotomized score was created: (0) Among the worst/Below the average/In the average, (1) Above the average/Among the best.

Program completion (T2). Participants reported whether they had completed their vocational training program (0 = Dropped out; 1 = Graduated).

Job relatedness to program (T2). Employed participants were asked about how much their current job was related to their vocational training program, from 1 (Not at all) to 4 (A lot). A dichotomized score was created: (0) Not at all/A little bit, (1) Fairly/A lot.

Statistical analyses

We tested moderation effects (see Figure 2) using the SPSS Process 3.5 macro (Hayes, 2017). Linear regression analyses were conducted with school-to-work transition adjustment at T2 as the dependent variable (DV), pandemic context as the independent variable (IV), and support-seeking tendencies at T1 as the continuous moderator. Separate models were tested for the three dimensions of school-to-work transition adjustment (knowledge, work skills, social skills) and the three types of

support (informal support, professional support, teachers' and classmates' support), for a total of nine models. Models were run controlling for gender, age, graduation from vocational training program (versus dropping out of the program), and job relatedness to the program. For analyses involving the knowledge dimension of the DV, we also controlled for self-reported school performance at T1. Control variables were chosen based on their theoretical or empirical associations with school-to-work transition adjustment. The results presented below were later confirmed in models without covariates. As recommended by Hayes (2017), significant interactions were probed by testing the conditional effects of pandemic groups (IV) at three percentiles of support-seeking tendencies (16th, 50th, 84th).

RESULTS

Preliminary analyses

Before conducting the main analyses, outliers were replaced by the next highest/lowest value that was not an outlier. This was the case for two participants with the highest scores on the professional support subscale of the IV and for five participants with the lowest scores on the social skills subscales of the DV. The study results were subsequently confirmed using the original scores. All models met assumptions for normality of residuals and homoscedasticity, so none of the variables were transformed. In Table 2, proportions, means, and standard deviations are reported separately for the pre-pandemic and pandemic groups, and correlations between study variables are reported in Table 3. Chi-square analyses and t-tests showed that participants from the pandemic group were more likely to be women, $\chi^2 = 5.66, p = .017$, to report average/below-average school performance at T1, $\chi^2 = 5.46, p = .019$, and to seek out professional support at T1, $t(46.395) = -2.66, p = .011$, as compared to pre-pandemic participants. (Note that T1 variables were measured before the pandemic onset for both groups.) The two groups did not differ significantly on any other study variables.

TABLE 2. Proportions, means, and standard deviations for the study variables for the pre-pandemic and pandemic groups

	Pre-pandemic (n = 77)	Pandemic (n = 32)
	% (n) / M (SD)	% (n) / M (SD)
Gender (women)	64.9% (50)	87.5% (28)
Age	21.89 (2.75)	20.85 (2.85)
School performance at T1 (Above average)	51.9% (40)	28.1% (9)
Program completed	87.0% (67)	84.4% (27)
Job relatedness to program (fairly/a lot)	66.2% (51)	50.0% (16)
Informal support	4.68 (1.31)	4.37 (1.55)
Professional support	2.27 (1.06)	3.00 (1.40)
Teachers' & classmates' support	3.75 (1.69)	3.90 (1.58)
Knowledge	4.90 (.82)	4.68 (.85)
Work skills	4.94 (.90)	4.74 (1.03)
Social skills	4.95 (.68)	4.96 (.71)

TABLE 3. Correlations for the study variables for the pre-pandemic and pandemic groups

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.
1. Gender (women)	-	-.05	.03	.10	-.29	.20	.14	.25	-.29	-.45*	-.13
2. Age	-.20	-	-.25	-.12	-.17	-.04	.33	.19	-.12	-.35	-.03
3. School performance	-.07	-.04	-	.27	.18	-.08	-.13	-.07	.29	.38	.06
4. Program completed	.09	.09	.18	-	.21	.03	-.06	.18	.37*	.26	.06
5. Job relatedness to program (fairly/a lot)	.17	.17	.20	.49**	-	.11	-.07	.06	.75**	.71**	.29
6. Informal support	.11	.26*	.07	-.01	.14	-	.20	.57**	-.00	.02	-.03
7. Professional support	.10	.24*	.08	.02	-.30	.23*	-	.22	-.17	-.65**	-.47**
8. Teachers' & classmates' support	.23*	.16	.11	-.22	-.19	.33**	.38**	-	-.51**	-.26	-.28
9. Knowledge	-.20	.13	.49**	.26*	.34**	-.01	.10	.14	-	.68**	.32
10. Work skills	-.32*	.30*	.15	.23	.50**	.24	.10	-.03	.32*	-	.50*
11. Social skills	-.04	.25*	.16	.09	.32*	.29*	.14	.11	.38**	.44**	-

Note. Correlations for the pre-pandemic group appear below the diagonal and above the diagonal for the pandemic group. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

Main analyses

Table 4 shows the main effects, interaction effects, and conditional effects obtained in the nine models tested (3 dimensions of school-to-work transition adjustment X 3 types of support). Only one main effect was significant, showing that the tendency to seek support from an informal network predicted higher social skills during the school-to-work transition across the full sample (both in the pre-pandemic and pandemic groups). The study hypotheses were tested using the interaction effects. Three significant interactions emerged. First, the association between the pandemic context and the knowledge outcome was moderated by students' tendencies to seek support from teachers and classmates. Second, the association between pandemic context and work skills was moderated by professional support-seeking. Lastly, a significant interaction effect between the pandemic context and the tendency to seek support from professionals was found with the social skills outcome. No significant interaction effect involving informal support-seeking was revealed. In addition, no main effect of the pandemic context and support-seeking emerged, except for informal support-seeking which was positively associated with social skills.

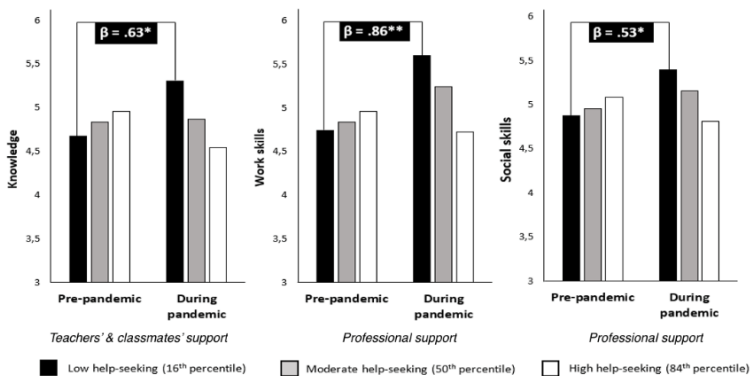
TABLE 4. Coefficients for main effects, interaction effects, and conditional effects for the adjusted models

	Knowledge		Work skills		Social skills	
	β	R ²	β	R ²	β	R ²
Informal support		.38***		.42***		.18*
Pandemic context	.09		.20		.05	
Informal support	-.02		.15		.15*	
Informal support x Pandemic	.02		-.17		-.20	
Professional support		.40***		.45***		.18*
Pandemic context	.06		.31		.13	
Professional support	.12		.08		.08	
Professional support x Pandemic	-.14		-.38**		-.28*	
Teachers' and classmates' support		.44***		.40***		.16*
Pandemic context	.10		.20		.08	
Teachers' and classmates' support	.08		-.00		.04	
Teachers' and classmates' support x Pandemic	-.30**		-.07		-.18	
Conditional effects of significant interactions						
<i>Professional support</i>						
Low support-seeking (16th percentile)			.86**		.53*	
Moderate support-seeking (50th percentile)			.40		.20	
High support-seeking (84th percentile)			-.24		-.27	
<i>Teachers' and classmates' support</i>						
Low support-seeking (16th percentile)	.63*					
Moderate support-seeking (50th percentile)	.03					
High support-seeking (84th percentile)	-.42					

Note. All models were adjusted for gender, age, program completion, and job relatedness to the program. When using the Knowledge dimension as a dependent variable, we additionally adjusted for prior school performance. For all models, the bootstrap technique using 5000 samples was applied. For the pandemic context, pre-pandemic was coded 0 and pandemic was coded 1.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Figure 3 illustrates the conditional effects for the significant interactions. Pre-pandemic and pandemic groups differed on school-to-work transition adjustment only for participants who reported low support-seeking tendencies before the pandemic. Contrary to expectations, a low tendency to seek support from teachers and classmates was associated with higher knowledge scores in the pandemic group than in the pre-pandemic group. Similarly, a low tendency to seek professional support was associated with higher work skills and social skills scores in the pandemic group than in the pre-pandemic group.



Note. $^*p < .05$. $^{**}p < .01$.

FIGURE 3. Interaction between pandemic context and support-seeking tendencies at T1 predicting dimensions of school-to-work adjustment at T2

DISCUSSION

Resiliency is the process through which individuals successfully adapt to changing circumstances, by combining their inner resources with the seeking and obtaining of support from their social environment (Masten & Motti-Stefanidi, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic offered an ideal situation in which to test whether support-seeking would bolster vocational students' resiliency, and thus act as a protective factor that would facilitate the successful adjustment for those who were experiencing their school-to-work transition during this crisis.

This study was thus designed to test the hypothesis that support-seeking would be a protective factor for vocational training students who were transitioning from school to work during the challenging context of the COVID-19 pandemic. We hypothesized that a high tendency to seek

support would help participants be resilient in the face of the pandemic and contribute to a more successful transition from school to work. Rather, participants with a low tendency to seek support from professionals, teachers, and classmates while they were in school adjusted better to the school-to-work transition if they were in the pandemic group as compared to the pre-pandemic group. Possible explanations may be found in results from studies that highlight autonomy as a factor that promotes successful remote work (Allen et al., 2015; Brunelle, 2010). As further discussed below, it seems that social distancing due to the pandemic could make autonomous individuals feel competent during their school-to-work transition, as they coped better than their peers who normally would tend to rely on their network to help them get through challenging times. Another possible explanation inspired by the work of Lewis et al. (2014) on distance learning indicates that many students appreciated the opportunity to study at their own pace and get ahead in their work. These students in particular may have seen distance learning as a stimulating challenge and appreciated the autonomy granted by a situation wherein they took on responsibility for their own learning and time management. The development of such organizational skills may have also contributed to their sense of competence.

Support-seeking from classmates and teachers

Starting in adolescence and throughout emerging adulthood, one of the most noticeable social changes for young people is their moving away from their parents to become closer to their peers. Youth who are enrolled in educational programs spend a large part of their daytime in their school environment, such that teachers and classmates may also become among their closest social resources and exert a strong influence on them (Lebacqz et al., 2019).

In the present study, for individuals who did not tend to seek much support from teachers and classmates while in school, experiencing the school-to-work transition during the pandemic was associated with higher self-reported mastery of the knowledge relevant to one's profession than for those in the pre-pandemic group. This result contrasts with previous research carried out outside of the pandemic context with elementary, secondary, and college students, wherein seeking out support from teachers and classmates is associated with academic success (Auerbach et al., 2011; Calarco, 2011; Estell & Perdue, 2013). However, according to Rickwood et al. (2005), students between the ages of 14 and 24 are more likely to seek support from their informal network than from teachers. Thus, perhaps participants who had a low tendency to rely on their

teachers during their studies had already developed stronger self-reliance, resourcefulness, and an ability to rely on their informal network, such that they were better prepared for a transition to the workplace. This resourcefulness may have been especially valuable in the pandemic context, which disrupted interactions with one's formal social support network.

Support-seeking from professionals

Among participants with a low tendency to seek support from professionals while in school, those who completed our assessment on their school-to-work transition during the pandemic reported having higher levels of work skills and social skills than their counterparts who reported on those outcomes before the pandemic. According to Calarco (2011), young adults living in difficult socioeconomic conditions are less likely to reach out for professional support than those who come from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. Considering that many vocational training students come from disadvantaged backgrounds (Masdonati et al., 2015), we hypothesize that some students had already developed alternative coping strategies instead of seeking out professional help for their difficulties. With the pandemic restricting access to professional care (Ammi, 2020), participants who relied on other coping strategies may have been the most resilient during the pandemic.

Informal support-seeking

When designing the study, we put forward a preliminary question as to whether students who have a strong tendency to seek social support achieve a more successful transition from school to work than their peers in general (regardless of the pandemic context). Based on the results, the answer to this question seems to be positive, at least when considering informal support and the social skills outcome. In fact, the tendency to seek help from one's informal network did not moderate the association between the pandemic context and participants' adjustment in the school-to-work transition. Nevertheless, we observed that informal support had a significant main effect when predicting the social skills aspect of school-to-work adjustment. A possible explanation for this finding could be that informal support remained the least affected by the pandemic because participants were still able to connect with their family, partners, and friends, either in person or virtually. Thus, a modest but positive association between informal support and later adjustment could be detected. In addition, results from another study carried out in Quebec suggest that vocational training is not highly valued in society in general, because many believe that it is largely intended for students who have been

unsuccessful in previous academic settings (Masdonati et al., 2015). However, parents and friends of vocational training students are able to recognize associated opportunities such as fast access to the labor market and have a positive perception of these programs (Masdonati et al., 2015). Whether they experience the stressful context of a pandemic or not, maintaining interactions with those who have positive attitudes toward one's career choice might be crucial for emerging adults.

CONCLUSION

The results from this study made important contributions to our understanding of young adults' resiliency processes when the crucial transition from school to work is disrupted by a major crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The fact that expected resiliency factors played out in a very different way than we had hypothesized highlights the importance of paying close attention to students' reactions to a new situation, like the pandemic crisis. This recommendation is not only relevant for students in vocational training but also for other educational settings. Similar processes may be observed among other students who lived through important transitions during the pandemic and had to adapt to their new environment while experiencing remote learning. Notably, some students transitioned from elementary school to high school, from high school to CEGEP, or from CEGEP to university during the pandemic. Although students who are highly interactive and involved in social exchanges in school may not seem to be at risk under normal circumstances, those who tend to be introverted and more autonomous in their learning, requiring less external help, may benefit from distance to a greater extent than their counterparts (Lewis et al., 2014). Future research is needed to learn more about this subject and help school staff and professionals be better prepared in case of future disasters or events that impact learning environments.

This study had some limitations that must be acknowledged. First, the non-experimental design limited the causal inferences we could make about pandemic effects on emerging adults transitioning from vocational training into the job market. Second, our small sample prevented us from comparing participants in different training and work domains who were affected in very different ways by the pandemic. For example, personal support workers were highly sought after to work in long-term care homes and may have been overwhelmed with their work in healthcare settings. Cooks, on the other hand, may have lost their jobs with little hope of

finding another one because many restaurants closed permanently and those that initially re-opened were closed again during the second wave of the pandemic.

It should also be noted that the small scale of this study did not allow us to include students from all programs available in the province, and such a lack of diversity in the participants could affect the generalizability of our findings. Relatedly, it should be kept in mind that the prerequisites to access vocational training can also affect resiliency. Thus, in this study, students' prior education was an important yet unmeasured factor that could have affected participants' outcomes. Future studies should pay particular attention to the fact that the overall resilience a student has developed while studying in the youth sector or adult education could affect their vocational training experience. For example, some programs require mostly Grade 9 level prerequisites, whereas others require mostly Grade 10 courses. Developing additional academic competence before one's vocational training may thus further foster students' resilience. A last limitation concerns the low representation of male participants. Most participants in this study were women because the larger research project from which this study emerged focused on training programs that required a significant amount of human contact and interactions, and such programs are more popular among female students.

With these limitations noted, the current study has many strengths, including the fact that its longitudinal design enabled us to measure the predictors and moderators prospectively, thus avoiding possible biases that a retrospective design might have induced. Furthermore, following up with students after the end of their vocational training is rarely done because participants can be difficult to track down, and they must be contacted individually, often on several occasions, to collect their responses on a second measurement point. Documenting the school-to-work transition prospectively is thus a considerable achievement of this study. Moreover, we were able to control for third-variable effects from many potentially confounding variables.

In conclusion, results from this study revealed that moderation analyses are important for uncovering the specific contexts and unexpected ways in which the pandemic has given rise to difficulties or resiliency in young adults. Resilience factors studied extensively in the past (e.g., help-seeking tendencies) can act differently in a crisis context. This may also be true for youth at different levels of education (preschool, primary, secondary, CEGEP, and university), as they may react similarly if the conditions of the learning process change such that less support is available. It is thus

important to empirically verify which factors prove protective for students in various settings who experienced the COVID-19 crisis to guide interventions aimed at preparing for other events that may affect students' lives and the school system in the future.

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